



U.S. Department of Justice
Immigration and Naturalization Service
U. S. Border Patrol
San Diego Sector

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY, FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCERNING

ENFORCEMENT INITIATIVES AGAINST DRUG
SMUGGLING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

11:00 A.M.
April 13, 2001
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Chief Bill Veal of the San Diego Border Patrol Sector. I am pleased to testify concerning our law enforcement initiatives that are effectively addressing drug smuggling in Southern California. First, I will discuss the Border Patrol deterrent strategy along the immediate border. Second, I will describe our cooperative drug enforcement efforts with other Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

Let me begin by thanking you and your colleagues in Congress who have worked diligently to provide the Immigration and Naturalization Service and specifically the U.S. Border Patrol with the essential resources to gain control of the border against the illegal entry of aliens, drugs or other contraband.

BORDER PATROL ENFORCEMENT

I am very proud of the agents of the San Diego Sector. Their hard work, dedication and professionalism have made possible the success we have achieved so far. We have brought a sense of order and law to what was once a chaotic, out of control border between San Diego County and Mexico. In Fiscal Year 1995, the first year of Operation Gatekeeper, the San Diego Sector seized 1,735.5 pounds of cocaine and 77,289 pounds of marijuana. That fell in Fiscal Year 2000 to 196 pounds of cocaine and 33,630 pounds of marijuana. Our agents have made life much more difficult for the drug and alien smugglers who frequented the border area and who, before Operation Gatekeeper, brought their wares across our borders with virtual impunity.

Border Patrol Narcotics Enforcement Mission

The U.S. Border Patrol is the primary federal agency tasked with the interdiction of illegal aliens and narcotics between our ports-of-entry. Under a memorandum of understanding with the Drug

Enforcement Administration, trained Border Patrol Agents have been delegated limited authority under Title 21 that, coupled with limited Title 19 authority from the U.S. Customs Service, allows them to enforce federal criminal laws related to the illicit trafficking and importation of contraband, including illegal narcotics.

The San Diego Border Patrol Sector maintains a highly visible presence on the U.S.-Mexico border and also covers 7,000 square miles of land and water boundaries. Nearly 66 linear miles of the southwest U.S. border are the responsibility of this Sector, where the Border Patrol is nearly 2,000 agents strong.

The Bush Administration continues to make border control a top priority. Over the past six years Congress has provided the Immigration and Naturalization Service with the resources necessary for an effective border enforcement strategy. That deterrent strategy has made a difference and now must sustain itself over time—a solid and permanent strategy that will result in our borders being controlled. Our mission is a focused, phased approach toward attaining a border that deters drug traffickers, illegal aliens and alien smugglers.

Based on intelligence reports and actual experience, drug smuggling and alien smuggling are often linked. Many criminal smuggling rings are involved in both. Illegal migrants seeking assistance from smugglers may become “mules” who backpack in large quantities of illicit narcotics as payment for their illegal passage into the United States.

The Border Patrol employs a multi-faceted strategy in conducting enforcement activities in order to deter or apprehend alien and drug smugglers along our border with Mexico. At the immediate border we deploy agents in highly visible positions. We utilize fences, high-powered lighting, electronic sensor systems, infrared night vision scopes, low light TV cameras, horse patrols, boat patrols, and

bicycle patrols. We also employ a system of checkpoints situated along major roads and highways leading away from border areas. These checkpoints are highly effective to deter the movement of and intercept both illegal aliens and drugs.

Operation Gatekeeper

In October 1994, the San Diego Sector's Operation Gatekeeper introduced a deterrent strategy. Given the unique and differing terrain of traditionally favored crossing areas, Gatekeeper combines an immediate, highly visible border presence with an improved infrastructure consisting of all-weather border roads, improved fencing, stadium lighting, night vision scopes and electronic sensors. It also maintains pressure on smugglers by operating the aforementioned checkpoints leading north to Los Angeles and the interior of California.

Since Gatekeeper began, illegal entries in the Imperial Beach area—historically the most heavily trafficked illegal entry corridor in the United States—have dropped 89 percent. Overall apprehensions in the Sector have fallen by 66 percent during this period, Fiscal Year 1994 to Fiscal Year 2000. Local law enforcement officials attribute the decrease in crime in several communities to Operation Gatekeeper. Felony arrests for narcotics, marijuana and other dangerous drugs in San Diego County declined by 25.6 percent from 1994 to 1999.

Prior to 1992, there was inadequate primary fencing along the first 14 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border from the Pacific Ocean east. In some places, paved Tijuana streets paralleled the border and at weak spots in the fencing single and multiple truckloads of drugs crossed over and raced north to blend into the regular vehicle traffic on Otay Mesa. The landing mat border fence erected by California National Guard and other military engineering units changed this dramatically. The last gap in the landing

mat fence was closed in 1996. Construction of border security roads have allowed us to patrol close to the primary fence and monitor for attempts to cut it or ramp vehicles over it. While we have had some kamikaze runs by drug smugglers through the Otay Port-of-Entry, we no longer have 4 x 4's entering between the ports and attempting to evade pursuing Border Patrol Agents.

The traffickers still try. Our permanent and temporary checkpoints plus the agents who monitor traffic on East County back roads continue to discover narcotics loads that were brought in either in San Diego or Imperial County.

Technology as a Force Multiplier

Technology has vastly improved our detection and resource deployment. A large portion of Border Patrol drug seizures and a tremendous amount of “real-time” intelligence are the direct result of the use of electronic sensors placed along remote smuggling routes in the border area. Over 950 sensors are now deployed in the San Diego Sector. These sensors, which function as infrared, seismic or metallic detection devices, are also monitored by computer. The information is a computer database, the Intelligent Computer Aided Detection System that provides data on sensor activation and apprehension patterns.

The San Diego Sector has 28 long range, infrared night scopes in use. They are located to provide maximum coverage of land border crossing points as well as the Pacific Coast close to the border. This night vision equipment has discovered backpackers, suspicious load vehicles, and even lone smugglers in wet suits with marijuana lashed to surfboards.

The Enforcement Case Tracking System (ENFORCE) and the Automated Biometrics Identification System (IDENT) are computer identification systems that enable agents to easily photograph, fingerprint and gather information about aliens whom we apprehend. We have ENFORCE

terminals at every Border patrol station, checkpoint and processing point in the Sector. These systems provide agents with a real-time, “look-out” system for known criminals and other aliens who attempt illegal entry after formal removal. The IDENT cumulative database tracks repeat offenders and helps us identify smuggling guides among apprehended groups.

Our Brown Field Station is the pilot site for developing the IDENT interface with the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) that allows us electronically to take ten-print fingerprints, transmit them to the FBI’s National Criminal Information Center, and receive confirmation as to past criminal records and pending arrest warrants. This automated system provides a response within 2-5 minutes. During test periods when all aliens arrested by Brown Field were submitted, it has identified as past offenders or wanted individuals an added number of criminals equivalent to the number identified by our IDENT database.

The Border Patrol Canine Program is another example of our commitment to controlling the flow of narcotics and undocumented aliens across our borders. We have 28 dogs in the San Diego Sector trained to locate concealed people and narcotics. They operate throughout the Sector with the majority at our checkpoints. During Fiscal Year 2000, these canines accounted for drug seizures valued at \$14,431,566. Our canine units also respond to requests from other law enforcement agencies.

I also want to mention the drug education efforts made by our agents, particularly our canine handlers, in the local schools. Their presentations on the dangers of drug use and the way in which the dogs can find hidden drugs are very much sought by local educators.

After climbing steadily from 1993 to 1995, Sector drug seizures have fallen in the last five fiscal years. The chart at the end of the testimony illustrates these changes. We believe this drop reflects the effectiveness of our enforcement efforts between the ports-of-entry. In Fiscal Year 2000 we

experienced a sizable increase in marijuana interdictions by comparison with Fiscal Year 1999. The drug smugglers keep trying new avenues and searching for weak spots.

COOPERATIVE EFFORTS WITH OTHER AGENCIES

The San Diego Sector is a very active member of the California Border Alliance Group (CBAG) and its Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area initiatives. CBAG is made up of Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies with responsibility for drug enforcement.

East County and the LECC

One CBAG initiative focuses on the interdiction and disruption of narcotics trafficking in East San Diego County and is a basic and indispensable part of the overall regional plan. Shared jurisdictions within the operating area include the Border Patrol, U.S. Customs, U.S. Forest Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, California Highway Patrol, California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement (BNE), and the San Diego Sheriff's Office, all of whom participate in this initiative.

The 1997 creation of a Law Enforcement Coordination Center (LECC) in East County has been a very successful CBAG project. Personnel from the Border Patrol, Forest Service, Sheriff's Office, BNE and the Highway Patrol currently staff the LECC. The Border Patrol provides space for the LECC at its Boulevard Substation.

The LECC operates as an intelligence-driven joint task force to deny drug smugglers their traditional routes between ports-of-entry and then to interior destinations. The LECC is the central point for gathering and disseminating intelligence within its East County area of operation. It also coordinates interdiction and investigative assets to detect, disrupt and dismantle major trafficking

organizations moving drugs through this area. Sixty-seven multi-agency operations were conducted in Calendar Year 2000.

Just last week, the Border Patrol, Sheriff's Office, Highway Patrol and the BNE completed a joint interdiction operation. They intercepted two marijuana loads, a stolen vehicle, and a convicted felon.

Since the inception of the LECC and with the enhanced enforcement efforts between the ports of entry, there has been a 111 percent increase in narcotics seizures by all parties within East County including at the Tecate Port of Entry. The improved coordination and cooperation have increased the effectiveness of every law enforcement agency. We have unquestionably increased the cost of doing business for the drug trafficking organizations.

Maritime Task Force

Another CBAG initiative is the San Diego Maritime Task Force, on which the Border Patrol participates along with the U.S. Customs Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and the San Diego Police Department. While the Task Force focuses on the investigation and interception of sea-borne smuggling in Pacific coastal waters, it also involves the investigation of international smuggling originating at considerable distance from U.S. territorial waters. Because the LECC and the U.S. Customs Service Intelligence Collection Analysis Team focus mainly on land based smuggling organizations and activities, the Border Patrol created a Maritime Intelligence Group to collect, analyze and disseminate maritime smuggling information.

Due to the volume of small, opportunistic smugglers working in coastal waters, the San Diego Sector has established a Marine Unit attached to the Imperial Beach Station. Utilizing night scopes and

three 24-foot Zodiacs, the Marine Unit has successfully intercepted a number of smuggling vessels and forced back south several others.

For example in February, we caught two smugglers posing as “day sailors” with 13 illegal aliens. Mexican nationals had taken the thirteen to the Coronado Islands, where the U.S. smugglers picked them up and attempted to bring them into Mission Bay in broad daylight.

Border Coordination Initiative

The Border Coordination Initiative (BCI) is a comprehensive border management strategy between the U.S. Customs Service and INS to increase cooperation among federal agencies along the Southwest border to more efficiently interdict drugs, illegal aliens and other contraband. While the BCI is particularly focused on port-of-entry enforcement, the San Diego Sector cooperates in the sharing of intelligence, controlled deliveries, investigation, and maritime interdiction.

Support from the California National Guard and DOD

The San Diego Sector has received significant support from the United States military and National Guard units, based on Presidential Directives and congressional legislative provisions stating that the Department of Defense should provide counter-drug intelligence, training, and direct tactical support to existing efforts to curb drug trafficking.

From 1994 to 2000, the San Diego Sector benefited greatly from the Immigration Support Team of the California National Guard. During this period California National Guardsmen served as intelligence analysts, electronic technicians, firing range officers, infrared scope operators, bus drivers and vehicle mechanics. Previously and now again many necessary support positions in the San Diego Sector are occupied by Border Patrol Agents, taking them away from their primary responsibility of enforcing the law along our border.

Cooperation from the Mexican Government

The Border Patrol also works with Mexican law enforcement along the border in order to stem the dangerous activities of border bandits who prey on migrants, drug smugglers, and other criminals. We have implemented procedures and structures for a more rapid and coordinated response to specific criminal activity in the border area. The Mexican Government has designated formal police units, referred to as Grupo Beta in the San Diego-Tijuana area and Grupo Alfa in the Tecate, California-Tecate, Mexico area, that focus on combating border crime.

The San Diego Sector has worked with the Mexican Consul General in San Diego and other Mexican authorities in a joint Border Safety Initiative to reduce injuries and prevent fatalities in the border area. Public safety radio announcements and videotapes have been prepared and given considerable play in Mexico to publicize the dangers of attempting entry through the mountainous and desert corridors where smugglers take aliens.

CONCLUSION

In summary, let me say that the mission of the Border Patrol remains the same: To secure our national borders working in cooperation with other agencies .

Our enforcement posture is based on:

- Prevention through deterrence expressed through high visibility presence at the immediate border,
- Redeployment of personnel and resources to key border areas,
- Flexibility to address vulnerable areas employing a comprehensive strategy,
- Technology as a force multiplier, and
- Cooperation with other law enforcement agencies.

The Border Patrol has established effective control of our border with Mexico in the San Diego area. Our illegal alien apprehensions in Fiscal Year 2000 were the lowest since 1974. We have secured areas of the border where six years ago illegal aliens entered our country with near impunity. We have shut down traditional illegal entry routes, forcing alien smugglers to lead illegal crossers to remote and rural regions. Illegal aliens and smugglers are now exposed to longer and more arduous entry routes and are subjecting themselves to greater risk of apprehension. In short, the Border Patrol has successfully raised the cost and difficulty of entering the United States illegally. These efforts have also disrupted former routes for importing illicit drugs. They have forced smugglers to attempt to utilize ports-of-entry and untraditional routes to further their illegal activity. Operation Gatekeeper has also pushed smugglers into increased marine smuggling efforts. The Operation Gatekeeper strategy has been implemented and is showing results in Imperial County and in Arizona and Texas as well.

Regaining control of our borders is an on-going task. No single initiative or program can achieve the goal. We appreciate the attention of this Subcommittee to the problems we face. Again, we thank the Congress for its support of our enforcement efforts.

This concludes my written testimony. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.